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COMMUNICATIONS

THE DUTCH SETTLEMENTS OF SHEBOYGAN COUNTY

Some months ago there was placed in my hands a separate from the *WISCONSIN MAGAZINE OF HISTORY* for March, 1918, entitled "The Dutch Settlers of Sheboygan County," by Sipko F. Rederus. The author deserves credit for his painstaking portrayal of these Dutch pioneers. Since I long ago served as pastor of the Reformed Church of Oostburg, Sheboygan County, I wish to make a few additional statements, and develop somewhat more fully than Mr. Rederus has done the history of these Dutch settlements.

To this end it will not be out of place to take a brief survey of the Hollanders in America. The first Dutch settlement was founded at New Amsterdam (now New York) not long after the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. The settlers were a religious people of the Calvinistic type. Soon after taking possession of Manhattan Island they organized a church. They felt the need of church life and work, not only, but of the religious education of their children; so the minister and the schoolmaster were found side by side. Thus began what is now the oldest and wealthiest (in proportion to the size) of all ecclesiastical bodies in America; for generous legacies were left to the Dutch churches of New York which at present yield large incomes.

Soon other Dutch settlements sprang up along the Hudson River, on Long Island and in New Jersey, which for many years held tenaciously to the Dutch language and customs. I have more than once met descendants of these first Dutch settlers in the East, able to speak the language as it was spoken three hundred years ago in the Netherlands.

But as New Amsterdam was seized by the English in 1664, emigration from Holland to this country ceased for a long time. In 1846, however, by reason of hard times and religious oppression of those who had separated from the state church, emigration to America was renewed on a large scale. Since then large numbers of Dutch have made their permanent homes in this country. They are found

in nearly every state of the Union; they are, however, more numerous in Michigan and Iowa than in any other state.

These later immigrants to America for the greater part naturally joined the Dutch Reformed Church, which they regarded as the church of their forefathers. Although this church is spoken of by Reverend Rederus and many others not belonging to its fellowship as the Dutch Reformed, in fact it no longer bears this name. What was once the Dutch Reformed Church dropped the word "Dutch" some fifty years ago to make it appear a purely American organization. It is now known as the Reformed Church in America. About the same time the German Reformed Church followed suit by doing away with the word "German," thus becoming the Reformed Church in the United States.

The Reformed Church in America is closely assimilated to the Presbyterian Church in doctrine and polity. It is an intensely American body, though hailing from the land of dikes and dunes. In this respect it differs from the Christian Reformed Church, a much smaller organization. The latter seceded from the Reformed Church more than fifty years ago, and holds on more persistently to the customs and usages of the old country, sometimes speaking of itself as the "immigrant" church. It advocates, among other things, the so-called Christian school system, considering our public schools as godless. This must necessarily have a sectarian tendency. The Reformed Church is broad in its sympathies toward all Christian denominations, while the Christian Reformed stands aloof under the idea that in its isolation consists its strength.

The first Dutch settlers in Sheboygan County arrived in 1846 and 1847. The different elements among them coming from different provinces in the old country were difficult to harmonize, but, believing religion to be necessary to the stability and permanence of society, these pioneers strove to reconcile their divergent ideas and interests, seeking to promote their welfare spiritually as well as in material respects. These things Mr. Rederus has brought out clearly in his narrative. He tells us that Reverend Zonne founded the first Presbyterian Church among the Hollanders in Sheboygan County. It was at first a small, struggling congregation, and thus it remained for some time; later, under the leadership of the Rev. J. I. Fles, it

enjoyed a remarkable development. Mr. Fles was a young man from the Netherlands with the qualifications and tact requisite for the accomplishment of such a work. Although the Presbyterian Church was thus the first one established among the Dutch of Sheboygan County, the majority of the settlers belonged to the Reformed denomination. There are also in the county a few who adhere to the Christian Reformed Church.

The second church organized among the Sheboygan Dutch was the Reformed Church of Oostburg, four and a half miles north on the Sauk trail. The Rev. K. Van der Schuur was its first minister, serving for a number of years. From this organization later sprang the Presbyterian Church of Oostburg. It owes its origin to a vagrant preacher by the name of Jacob De Roo. He came from Paterson, New Jersey, where he had had charge of an independent church, and was wandering through the West in search of another field of labor. Reverend Van der Schuur's church seemed to offer a tempting bait. When the doors of the church were not opened to him, Reverend De Roo began to preach in barns, and by his eloquence and flattering manners ingratiated himself with the people. As a consequence, more than half of Reverend Van der Schuur's congregation seceded and soon organized a Presbyterian Church there. There are thus but two Presbyterian churches among the Dutch of Sheboygan County—the Cedar Grove church and that of Oostburg—both in the township of Holland. On the other hand, there are several Reformed Churches scattered through the county, viz.: at Cedar Grove, Oostburg, Gibbsville, Hingham, Sheboygan City, and Sheboygan Falls. These church societies are, on the whole, strong and influential in the community, with fine church buildings and parsonages.

Finally, for a number of years the Reformed Church has been maintaining at Cedar Grove a flourishing classical academy, whose doors are open to both sexes. Seeing the need of such an institution, the Dutch settlers contributed liberally for its endowment. Many of its graduates have pursued college courses elsewhere, and some are today filling important positions as ministers of the gospel, and as teachers in our public schools and higher institutions of learning.

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